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Marguerite Higgins

Putting the Record Straight On Singapore CIA Snarl

WASHINGTON — Isn't all this moralizing about the Central Intelligence Agency affair in Singapore unbecoming the conduct of a sophisticated nation crucially engaged in cold and hot wars with Communist enemies who proudly proclaim that any means—however dirty—justify the end?

Aside from the large quotient of hypocrisy, the moralizing is doubly insufferable because it appears in great part based on insufficient information as to what CIA is all about.

In a sense, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew picked a highly satisfactory target in his outburst against the CIA even if he was suddenly reviving an incident that took place five years ago. For the CIA cannot talk back.

Judging by the spate of editorials across the land, and indeed, around the globe, the Singapore affair is being used as a take-off point for scolding the CIA for all sorts of alleged misdeeds such as acting contrary to the policy of the U.S. government, jeopardizing relations with a country in defiance of the will of the U.S. ambassador on the scene, to name just a few recent charges.

But, in fact, a reasonably cool look at the Singapore incident discloses that the CIA is guilty of just one thing. It is guilty of getting caught.

Unfortunately, getting caught is one of the risks of the espionage trade, and nobody is going to give facts and figures to prove that the ratio of failures to success is 1,000 to 1.

TO PUT the Singapore affair in perspective, one of the mandates of the Central Intelligence Agency is to penetrate foreign intelligence networks both in Communist areas and in particularly sensitive places in the world.

In 1960, Malaysia was just beginning to be organized. There had been considerable penetration of the Malay peninsula by Red Chinese agents and Indonesian agents (a forerunner of Sukarno's confrontation policy). As of that date, the United States knew very little about the cast of official characters in Malaysia. Since it was becoming a very sensitive area, the U.S. government—not the CIA—decided to make a special intelligence-gathering effort on the Malayan peninsula.

It can be stated on authority that the decision to give priority, CIA's attention to the Malayan area was discussed and approved by the National Security Council of that era.

Therefore, far from free-wheeling, the CIA agent who tried to penetrate Singapore's Special Branch Intelligence net was not acting contrary to

Washington's will but was implementing U.S. government policy.

WITH REGARD to Singapore, even Prime Minister Lee (who was not then interested in using anti-U.S. tirades as a stepping stone to membership in the Afro-Asian bloc) did not take the affair very seriously at the time and let the arrested agent out of jail after a letter of apology from Dean Rusk.

Hopefully, in light of Lee's flirtations with the Communist bloc, some other American agents have succeeded in penetrating the Singapore intelligence net even if the first attempt failed.

There will probably be another outcry at the involvement of the CIA in an attempt to persuade the Dominican Republic's military strongman, Gen. Wessin y Wessin to leave the country, especially since the negotiations involved a certain amount of cash (this time the CIA offered to buy the general's house and some property at rather inflated prices).

But it was not the CIA's idea to send Gen. Wessin into exile. It was the decision of the U.S. government that the sacrifice of Wessin y Wessin might enhance Dominican stability since it would

eliminate an enemy of the leftists and thus possibly induce the rebels to accept compromise. The CIA was merely doing as Washington ordered.

THE MYTH that the CIA runs U.S. foreign policy overlooks the fact that it is accountable to the President and the National Security Council and is closely and periodically reviewed by the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board headed by Clark Clifford. Other watchdogs include the special congressional committees and the Budget Bureau.

The myth of CIA insubordination should have died long ago: like, for instance, during the Bay of Pigs. For at that time the CIA canceled an air strike against Castro's forces at President Kennedy's direction even though the agency totally and urgently opposed this cancellation.

And, as it turned out, the CIA's loyalty to Presidential orders helped to seal the doom of the Cuban brigade's expedition to the Bay of Pigs—a failure that stirred an outcry at the CIA.